

Dollars for day care [CA-NS]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Nova Scotia became the fifth province to reach a child care deal with Ottawa, inking an agreement on Monday worth \$137.3 million over the next five years.

Prime Minister Paul Martin and Premier John Hamm officially signed the deal for early childhood development and child care at CFB Halifax's Windsor Park on Monday morning.

Mr. Martin said early learning programs give Canadian children the best possible start in life.

The agreement promises Nova Scotia \$20.4 million this fiscal year, and \$18.8 million, \$33 million, \$32.7 million and \$32.4 million in the years that follow.

Mr. Hamm said the agreement will fund more licensed child care spaces in more areas in the province, increase support for parents, provide more training for staff and increase resources for child care centres.

On Friday, Mr. Martin traveled to Newfoundland to sign a \$99.7-million agreement. Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Ontario have signed similar deals.

The prime minister had planned to head to New Brunswick last week but cancelled when Premier Bernard Lord said there was no deal with Ottawa.

Mr. Martin was upstaged Monday by youngsters who clambered on his chair and made faces at the audience, and one knocked over his glass of water.

The prime minister, standing in a small puddle, used the accident to get some laughs from the audience.

"The opposition has done a lot of things, but so far, nobody's thrown water at me," Mr. Martin joked.

Pat Hogan, chairwoman of the Certification Council on Early Childhood Education, said the agreement is the best way to help children get the early education they need.

"We need to protect this agreement, which means battling for the budget," she said. "We have waited long enough and we should wait no longer."

But Danny Cavanaugh, president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees-Nova Scotia, said the deal falls short.

He said that unlike the agreements reached with Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia's deal doesn't earmark money for non-profit early learning and child care centres.

"That leaves the door open for more private centres and even big-box American chains to set up shop in Nova Scotia," he said.

Mr. Cavanaugh said the agreement also fails to guarantee improvements in the salaries of preschool teachers.

- reprinted from the Halifax Chronicle Herald

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